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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001975

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR P, R, NEA/FO, NEA/PD AND NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: COMBATING EXTREMISM IN ALGERIA

REF: STATE 159129

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Having defeated an armed Islamic extremist insurgency over the past thirteen years, Algeria has gained considerable experience in combating extremism. Algerian military and political leaders openly admit now that at the time of the army's intervention to prevent the election of an Islamist majority in 1991-92, the government and the army had only a tenuous claim to political legitimacy while the Islamist insurgency initially enjoyed some popular support, and benefited even more from widespread apathy and cynicism. The extremists lost in part due to their own bloody excesses, particularly their tactics of using massacre and rape against unarmed civilians, and in part because the army and security forces learned to couple their counterinsurgency operations with a media and information campaign designed to undermine the religious justification of the terrorists. After the first few years of the conflict, which saw serious human rights abuses, the military leadership also came to recognize that respecting the rights of the civilian population was key to winning hearts and minds and enlisting public support against the terrorists. Senior Algerian generals have told us this marked the turning point in their internal war against Islamic extremism.

2. (C) After President Bouteflika's election in 1999, he added the additional element of a limited amnesty known as the Civil Concord. Algerians will go to the polls again September 29 to vote in a referendum on Bouteflika's follow-on program called the Charter on National Reconciliation. The principal goal of Bouteflika's initiatives is to further isolate the remaining groups of Islamist terrorists by offering many of them the opportunity to turn themselves in peacefully and be reintegrated into society.

3. (C) The methods developed and used by the Algerian Government to counter extremism have included:

- unapologetically making clear its strong commitment to cooperate with international efforts to combat terrorism;

- convincing Islamic scholars with a broad following in Algeria such as Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, the Egyptian scholar based in Qatar, among others, to issue statements and fatwas condemning the brutal slaughter of Algerian civilians by terrorist groups, and circulating cassettes of these statements;

- sending consistent messages through state-controlled mosques and informal Sufi orders, especially during sermons at Friday prayers, condemning terrorism and violence as antithetical to Islamic values;

- President Bouteflika's frequent use of Quranic verses and Islamic rhetoric in public speeches to reinforce the message that the Government is not anti-Islamic;

- videotaping and broadcasting confessions by captured terrorists, particularly those implicated in massacres of civilians;

- allowing space in the political arena for moderate Islamic parties such as the Movement for a Society of Peace (a member of the majority coalition) and Islah (the largest legal opposition party), while continuing to bar the former leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front (known by its French acronym FIS) from returning to political activity;

- a broad consensus in the media, including the independent press, that terrorism is a plague that must be wiped out through international cooperation -- even if significant elements of the media and public opinion continue to insist that the right to resist foreign occupation precludes some non-Algerian terrorist organizations such as Hamas, Hizballah, and the Iraqi "resistance" (with the exception of Al-Zarqawi's group) from being considered terrorists.

4. (C) With our encouragement, Algeria has assumed a leading role in counterterrorism cooperation with its Sahelian neighbors to the south. We have also supported the establishment in Algiers of an African Union Center devoted

to the study and research of terrorism. The Center is emerging as an important site for counterterrorism training.

15. (U) The Government has focused on reforming and modernizing the education system, revising the curriculum to reduce the amount of time devoted to Islamic studies and reining in teachers who used their classrooms to inculcate extremist values and ideas among their students. State controlled radio promotes religious tolerance as well by broadcasting programs that feature mainstream Christian religious leaders based in Algeria. State institutions such as the Higher Islamic Council and the Ministry of Religious Affairs support inter-religious dialogue.

16. (U) A number of Algerian NGOs are also dedicated to promoting public awareness of the crimes committed by Algerian terrorists. These include such groups as the Organization of the Families of the Victims of Terrorism, as well as individual Algerian professionals such as psychiatrists who have devoted themselves to working with orphans from villages where terrorist massacres took place or to working with women who survived being kidnapped and repeatedly raped by terrorists, and photographers who have compiled documentary records of terrorist attacks on civilians.

17. (U) USG programs in Algeria effectively complement the efforts of the Algerian Government, Islamic establishment, and civil society to counter extremism. These programs enjoy the strong backing of the Government, and several represent partnerships with NGOs. The greatest constraint on our programming activities is the small size of our embassy staff, and especially our PD Section.

18. (U) The Ambassador has made the most of media interviews and public speeches to emphasize the values of tolerance, our common struggle against terrorism, and our respect for Algeria's religious traditions. While delivering a Cultural Preservation grant to preserve Islamic manuscripts stored at the Sufi Zaouia in Tolga, Ambassador stressed the commonality of peaceful values in Islam.

19. (U) Embassy PD Section, in coordination with ECA, NEA/PI and the Algerian Ministry of National Education, is implementing or supporting a number of projects promoting English language teaching. These include two English Language Fellows now working at the Ministry of National Education on training English-language teaching inspectors and English-language curriculum reform. A third Fellow will arrive shortly to teach English at the University of Algiers' training institute for public school English teachers.

-- An American professor has begun a year of teaching in the Department of English at the University of Bejaia. Earlier this year, an American professor of American Literature taught in the Department of English at Algiers University.

-- Eighty non-elite high school students participated in ECA's Microscholarship Program in four Algerian cities this year. We are going to double participation to 160 students this academic year and hope to expand it further in the future.

-- MEPI, in coordination with the Ministry of National Education, is about to launch a \$4 million Partnership School Program in Algeria. This initiative focuses on reforming English-language instruction in Algerian public schools. The program will also assist the Ministry introduce computer technology into classrooms and create partnerships between American and Algerian educational institutions.

110. (U) Programs supporting Algerian youth include the following:

-- The PD Section, in partnership with the Algerian NGO FOREM, has supported the distribution of 10,000 book bags to high school students throughout the country through the Department's Shared Future Program. The book bags, which are clearly identified as gifts from the American people, contain a book of photographs depicting everyday life around the United States, dictionaries, and school supplies.

-- During the past two years, over 30 Algerian high school students have participated in the P4LYES Open Door Program, which gave them an opportunity to spend a year studying in a U.S. high school while living with American families.

111. (U) Cultural Programs:

-- In 2004 the Embassy sponsored three concerts given by an American gospel singer in Algiers and Oran. The concerts were very well received and conveyed a message of religious and racial tolerance, in addition to their musical pleasures.

-- A similar concert series by a Latin jazz quartet is planned for later this year. The tour is sponsored by ECA's

American Music Abroad program.

-- Last year we programmed three Georgetown University basketball players in three Algerian cities through ECA's Basketball Cultural Envoys. We plan to do the same this year within the framework of ECA's NBA Basketball Initiative. Sports events are especially effective in connecting with Algerian youth.

12. (U) MEPI Programs:

-- Using a MEPI small grant, the Embassy worked last year with an Algerian and an American NGO to organize a two-day conference on Islam and Democracy. A number of Algerian political activists and academics participated in a lively discussion that brought together representatives of Algerian secular and moderate Islamist tendencies.

-- Another MEPI small grant enabled the Embassy to work with the Algerian National Syndicate of Journalists to hold a two-day conference to teach communications officials in a large number of key ministries how to serve as ministry spokespersons. The conference effectively promoted greater government transparency and responsible journalism.

-- Using a third MEPI small grant, the Embassy is working with an Algerian filmmaker to produce a documentary film depicting the lives of several Algerian women who have struggled to promote women's rights. The filmmaker will show the documentary to NGO workshops and other public gatherings throughout the country.

-- In July 2005, the National Democratic Institute and the Algerian Center of Information on the Rights of Children and Women co-hosted a MEPI-financed leadership workshop for 50 women political activists from both secular/nationalist and moderate Islamist political parties.

13. (U) IV Programs:

-- International Visitor programs are extremely beneficial in providing Algerian nominees with the opportunity to get to know the United States. This is especially important in Algeria since a relatively small percentage of Algerians have visited, lived or studied in the U.S., and the primary sources of their information about the U.S. are French and Arab satellite television and Hollywood movies, all of which provide distorted impressions. Participants in two recent successful IV programs (print and broadcast journalists and a free trade group) separately told us at a lunch hosted by the Ambassador that their IV programs had been an eye-opening experience, since almost all of them had never visited the U.S. and the real country they discovered was much friendlier, more peaceful, more open, and more modestly dressed than they had been led to believe by TV and film images. A woman journalist in the group who wears the Islamic head scarf said she had had reservations about participating because she expected to be mistreated at U.S. airports and on the street, but in fact she found Americans very welcoming and more accepting of her dress than was the case in Europe. Cheikh Bouamrane, the head of the High Islamic Council, has similarly told us that his participation in a Religion in America IV program greatly changed his view of American society since he had engaged in a dialogue with a broad range of Americans with diverse religious beliefs.

14. (U) EUCOM Humanitarian Assistance Projects:

-- The Embassy is also managing two major EUCOM-funded humanitarian construction projects -- a center for mentally handicapped children at Ghardaia and a center for "women in distress" in Naciria. Both projects, launched with high profile visits by the Ambassador, have effectively conveyed a message of shared concern and friendship, thus strengthening support for closer U.S.-Algerian cooperation, especially in counterterrorism. Another project that has been approved but not yet funded is the construction of a youth center in the economically depressed regional capital of Ouargala, for which the Ambassador has leveraged expected U.S. funding to raise an additional \$700,000 from U.S. private sector firms in Algeria. At all three centers, the focus of the programs is to provide disadvantaged Algerians with skills essential to securing good jobs and leading productive lives, and in the process send a positive message about the U.S. military and the American people.

ERDMAN